【研究ノート】

Tokyo Twilight: Aberrant Ozu

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Abstract

This paper will show that Yasujiro Ozu's 1957 film *Tokyo Twilight* (*Tokyo boshoku*) deviates from several of his typical patterns which results in a film that is can be seen as aberrant in the late postwar stage of his films. First there will be a discussion of patterns and characteristics of the films of Ozu. His great theme of that period, the family, and his main subject, the dissolution of the family, are the foundation for these patterns. The core of these films is the relationship between parent and child, which usually focuses on the indulgence of one another. Mikio Naruse's film, *Floating Clouds* (1955) is said to have been an influence on *Tokyo Twilight*. It is a departure from Ozu's usual terrain of the dissolution of the upper middle class family gives way to a story that includes such Narusian factors such as suicide, abortion, marital separation, and resentful children. After this film, which was a commercial and critical failure at the time, he would return to more positive, uncomplicated, and straightforward films in his late career.

Key Words: Film, Ozu, *Tokyo Twilight*, aberrant, melodrama

Introduction

Yasujiro Ozu is probably the second best known Japanese director worldwide today after Akira Kurosawa. Ozu's most celebrated film, *Tokyo Story* (1953), was selected as one of the 10 greatest films of all-time in the 2012 *Sight & Sound's* critic's list. In 2012, it also topped the poll of film directors' choices of "greatest film of all time". *Late Spring* (1949) also made the list at number 15. However, this has not always been the case. Ozu was late in coming to the attention to western audiences because Japanese film promoters thought that he was too Japanese for foreign audiences and refrained from exporting his films or sending them to international film festivals. His masterpiece *Tokyo Story* did not get a wide international release until 1972, 20 years after it was released in Japan, to universal acclaim.

Ozu got his start in the 20s and rose in to prominence as one of the early masters of Japanese film. His artistic breakthrough has been attributed to his 1932 his film *I Was Born But…*, which won acclaim as one of the first Japanese films to reflect social criticism. Ozu experimented with a number of genres early in his career such as comedies that focused on

college students and salarymen as well as focusing on young families in the *shomin –geki* (home drama) genre. He was slow to adapt to the talkies directing his first, *The Only Son* in 1936-five years after the first talkie was produced.

In the later postwar stage of his career his focus for films was crystallized into the *shomin –geki* with essentially one main subject: the family. In essence Ozu is, what Isaiah Berlin would characterize as a, "hedgehog," an artist who views the world through the lens of a single defining idea, his focus, specifically, was the dissolution of the family. This, singular focus, was true of his visual filmmaking style as well as his themes. His films are clearly identifiable by the invariable "tatami view", limited camera movement as well as restricted use of cinematic punctuation. (Richie 1974, p. 10) Noel Burch (1979) has noted that two of Ozu's systemics were first visible in *Woman of Tokyo* (1933) that would feature in every film he made until the end of his career: incorrect eyelines and "pillow-shots." The incorrect eyelines challenged the concept of continuity and creates a jolt in the flow of the film that creates a readjustment of orientation. The cutaway still-lifes, which Burch calls (1979, p. 160) "pillow-shots" suggest a casual relationship with pillow words of classical Japanese poetry (which are to function as images). Thus, stylistically Ozu was somewhat systematic in his film making style. Ozu himself used the metaphor of a tofu maker to describe his film making style: "I always tell people that I don't make anything besides tofu and that is because I am strictly a tofu dealer." (Richie 1974) It is sufficient to say that Ozu has patterns in his films, which is particularly noticeable in his later films. Burch's discussion of Ozu's films ends with *There Was a Father* (1942), which Burch considered his last masterpiece. He dismissed the postwar films as examples of "academic rigidity." (Burch 1979, p. 157) Nonetheless, the 1957 film *Tokyo Twilight* (*Tokyo boshoku*) deviates from several of Ozu's patterns of style and theme seen in most of his later postwar films, which results in a film that can be seen as aberrant for that period.

Patterns in the Films of Ozu

Generally speaking, there are certain patterns in the films of Ozu that are recognizable. His great theme, the family, and his main subject, the dissolution of the family, are the foundation for these patterns. This is punctuated by what Audie Bock (1978) called struggles of self-definition of individual freedom, of disappointed expectations, of the impossibility of communication, of separation and loss brought about by the passages of marriage and death. The traditional life, as Richie (1974) points out, that Ozu creates is one in which assumes that it is a part of something larger. It is a community in time that includes the dead and the yet unborn. It assumes that one is a part of the many types of nature. There is usually an oblique

reference to *mono no aware* ("the pathos of things"), in which the Japanese value the transient and unsatisfactory world we live in rather than find it absurd.

It has been suggested that there are no heroes, no villains, no great successes and no abject failures and that everyone portrayed in the Ozu universe is ordinary. (Bock 1978). Ozu's writing, often in tandem with Kogo Noda, reflects a rejection of the convenience of story and plot in favor of allowing characters to become more fully rounded. Furthermore, dialogue was of primary importance for Ozu and Noda, who often scripted the dialogue first while creating the characters for the films. The fathers are usually gruff, kind, or somewhat introverted. They tend to enjoy mah jong, alcohol and theatrical entertainment, literature, and natural scenery. They also tend to work in an office, but do not seem overly concerned with that work. They are known to fail their children by not observing their feelings intuitively. The mothers of the films tend to be gentle, hard working and more prone to voice their opinions and feelings than the fathers. And the daughters are mindful, modest, and often have jobs, but are reluctant to be separated from their parents. Children are generally small boys or about to get married.

Given that Ozu has one great theme, the family, it can be said that there are several stories and a few patterns in his films as mentioned by Richie (1974). Thus, the core of the film is the relationship between parent and child. (Bock 1978) This relationship usually focuses on the indulgence of one another. The Japanese cultural tradition of *amae*, described by Takao Doi (1973) as a feeling or need for dependence best describes this concept in Ozu's films. This is a cultural tradition that suggests that people expect to be taken care of by others, who are inherently aware of the needs and desires of individuals. Thus, the greatest threat to this sense of well-being is separation, which reflects the impossibility of showing dependence. It is, in a sense, a forced maturation. This separation is usually the marriage of a daughter, but could be a son in films like *The Only Son* (1936) or *There Was A Father* (1942). Similar storylines about daughters debating marriage and leaving home are: *Late Spring* (1949), *Early Summer* (1951), *Equinox Flower* (1958), *Late Autumn* (1960), and *An Autumn Afternoon* (1962). The plot-less cinema of archetypal families breaking apart has been described by Paul Schrader (1972) as a transcendental style that comes from the prosaic to a recognition of disparity that subsists in equity.

Although David Bordwell (1988) is reluctant to characterize Ozu's films due to divergent criteria, he has created a schemata of the narrative structure of his films. This cycle of life contains growth decay and separation of partners and generations:

Generation 1: 1. Family life: parent(s) raise child

2a. Parent sacrifices for child 2b. Separation of family members

Generation 2: 3. Youth grows up.

4. Youth get education

5a. Youth gets/holds job　　5b. Separation of family members

6a. Youth marries　　6b. Separation of family members

7. Family life: couple faces domestic crises.

Generation 3: 8. Family life: couple raises children

9a. Grandparents, parents, and children share household.　　9b. Separation of family members.

10. Family continues.

(Bordwell, 1988 pp.61-60).

Using this system he presents films in patterns. For example, several late films such as *Late Spring, Equinox Flower,* and *An Autumn Afternoon* follow the 6a-6b pattern. Whereas, *Tokyo Twilight* follows the pattern 7-9b, of which is quite distinct from other films. Even Bordwell, who is hesitant to pigeonhole Ozu, has identified an aberration in theme in the late postwar work with *Tokyo Twilight.*

Tokyo Twilight

It seems that from the beginning Ozu thought that his departure from his usual formula in *Tokyo Twilight*, his last black and white film, would not be well-received. Ozu suggested this possibility when he was making *The Brothers and Sisters of the Toda Family*, he states: "And after that (*The Brothers and Sisters of the Toda Family*) a lot of people always came to see my pictures. But long before [he was then working on *Tokyo Twilight*] I'm going to start making films that they won't." (Richie, 1974, p. 228) He was right; it was a commercial and critical failure at the time. It was his first film in 21 years not to make the yearly *Kinema junpo* Top 10 films poll, it placed 19th. In fact, before the film was released Ozu said: "Recently there has been increasingly severe criticism of the *Ofuna-cho* [home drama] flavor in films. But the traditions of Ofuna-cho are the result of thirty years. They are not going to fall in one morning. I believe that the true flavor of the Ofuna-cho will be found in this film." (Richie 1974, p. 241)

In Catherine Russell's book on Mikio Naruse (2008), she cites Jean Narboni in suggesting that Ozu's enthusiasm for Naruse's *Floating Clouds* (1955), generally known as Naruse's finest film, influenced *Tokyo Twilight.* In the Naruse film a young woman has an affair with a married man working as a forester in Japan-occupied Vietnam. When they are repatriated she pursues

the man who refuses to leave his faithful wife, but carries on with the woman and others. She resorts to becoming the mistress of a GI when she can't get a job. However, she still loves the forester and cannot give him up. She goes as far as even lending him money. In poverty, she becomes a mistress of a rich man, who is her uncle and had sexually abused her when she was younger, but gives him up when she cannot forget the forester. When the forester's wife, whom he never left, dies of disease, he takes a job far away in a rural area. Despite his continued lack of interest, the woman, who is being pursued by the rich man whose money she stole, goes with him. She becomes ill on the journey, rather than rest and recuperate, obsessed by her constant fear that he will leave her, she continues. She does not recover and dies. When she dies, the forester realizes his mistake in rejecting her unrequited love.

Ozu's departure from his usual terrain of the dissolution of the upper middle class family gives way to a story that includes such Narusian factors as suicide, abortion, marital separation, and resentful children. Narboni based this conclusion on reading Ozu's diaries in which he wrote at length about *Floating Clouds*. Naruse was seen as the "poor man's" Ozu or as Ozu's "great shadow" since both focused on family drama, however, Ozu was vocal in supporting the director with a "similar" voice. In fact, Ozu gave Naruse praise using a metaphor that he used for describing himself when he said: "You can't tell a tofu maker to make sausage. It simply won't work. A tofu maker can only make tofu. The only question is how tasty he can make tofu." (Russell 2008, loc 464). Thus, the spice Ozu used in writing and directing *Tokyo Twilight* was inspired by the gloomier, sadder films of Naruse and, the melodramatic *Floating Clouds*, in particular.

Bordwell (1988) in his book length study of Ozu suggest different reasons for Ozu's move into darker more melodramatic themed films at this point in his career. He suggests that in the years 1956-58 that there was an increasing criticism of the Shochiku Ofuna-flavor films, coupled with a rise in youth culture in film. The popularity of youth orientated films were seen in the number of teenage romance films and *taiyozoku* ("sun tribe") films about profligate youth that followed in the wake of smash hit adaptations of Shintaro Ishihara novels, *Season of the Sun* (1955) and *Crazed Fruit* (1956). Borwell suggests that this was inspiration for the brief turn to tales of adultery (*Early Spring* 1956), and teenage sex and abortion (*Tokyo Twilight* and *Floating Weeds* 1959). However, Bordwell (1988, p. 340) does admit, that in many respects, the film is comparable to Naruse's postwar films.

In *Tokyo Twilight*, the parallel narrative of two sisters and their trials and tribulations of their family life are recounted. The opening still life to the film shows a tree bare of leaves, suggesting wintertime. It is a rare that an Ozu film takes place in the dead of winter, in fact this is the only postwar film that takes place in winter, and immediately sets the tone that

this will not be a “typical” Ozu film. Most of its action takes place after sundown, in a variety of seedy bars in Ginza and rough-edged places like mah jong gambling parlors. When the film opens, the father Shukichi (Chishu Ryu), a passive, judgmental patriarch, returns home after a lunch with his sister where he has learned that his youngest daughter, Akiko (Ineko Arima), secretly pregnant and searching for her boyfriend, Kenji (Masumaru Taura), has approached her aunt for a loan and would not explain why she needed the money. Akiko’s sullen rebellion and deep-seated mistrust of the adults around her may not have won her much sympathy with some in Ozu’s audience. These sullen, rebellious children are a far cry from those who rely and are relied upon in his other later postwar films. However, a case can be made that she had justifiable reasons for being a sullen and rebellious youth. Despite the apparent indulgence of her father in his raising of her, she senses that something’s been awry in her relationship with him and the rest of her family for many years. Now that Akiko is coming of age, she discovers that the family history passed down to explain her mother’s absence was a fraudulent. It was conceived to preserve more a misguided sense of social propriety than in helping a child understand the decisions of the adults she depended on. At home his elder daughter, Takako (Setsuko Hara, playing brilliantly against type) has arrived with her child, Michiko, leaving behind her husband the abusive and heavy drinking academic Numata (Kinzo Shin) at home. Shukichi feels somewhat guilt-ridden about the situation, because he insisted she marry the professor instead of the man she loved more.

Eventually, Akiko borrows money from her father’s friend and gets an abortion. In the meantime, there is a major shakeup when their absent mother, Kikuko (Isuzu Yamada), who abandoned her three children (a missing brother died five years prior) when Akiko was three for her husband's subordinate and was presumed dead by the family, returns to Tokyo. She has relocated after all these years to Tokyo. She has a new man, her former lover died during the war in a prison camp, and they own a mahjong parlor in the downtown area that Akiko sometimes frequents. In time both sisters find out that the mother they resent has returned to Tokyo, and each has an emotionally devastating visit with the sorrowful mother. After the youngest daughter's visit, Akiko finally stumbles upon Kenji in a noodle shop. He reveals himself to be a heartless, spineless character. Earlier in the film when Akiko reveals that she is pregnant he says, “I wonder if it’s even mine.” He has been avoiding her and, when confronted with her at the noodle shop, he says that he has been looking for her and worrying constantly. This occurs just moments after the noodle shop manager told her that Kenji was looking for a new apartment in a different neighborhood. She is compelled to slap him due to his indifference about her situation. She then runs out into the street and attempts to commit suicide by jumping in the path of an oncoming train.

Following the suicide Kikuko pays her respects to Akiko's shrine and prepares to depart from Tokyo to live in the faraway Hokkaido. Then she waits hopefully in vain for Takako to see her off at the railroad station and forgive her. And as the train leaves without her daughter's return she starts to cry. Takako cries at home and decides to return to her husband. The reason she gives is that she does not want her young daughter to grow up as she and her sister did. In the last scene, the film focuses on the father who has learned the most from his daughter's death and now, at last, makes an attempt to communicate with his surviving daughter, Takako, and offers her his support and love. It was a little late to avert tragedy, but it's reassuring that he now understands that he failed to communicate in a fatherly way to his daughters. It ends with the ineffectual father praying before Akiko's altar, and the last shot of the film is the father walking out into bright sunshine of morning to report for work with a fresh start. As with many Ozu films, this ending suggests a resignation of that's how things are in life.

Brodwell (1988) makes an interesting observation about the ending of the film by suggesting that the ending of the film is essentially a reprise of *Late Spring*. Thus, when Takao asks her father how he will manage without her, he tries to reassure her by saying that he will rehire the maid. He then goes to pray before Akiko's altar. Thus, the film is brought back to the solitary father figure persisting in spite of all the chaotic turmoil of life not unlike *Late Spring* and *Tokyo Story*.

Ozu's vision of post-war Japan in *Tokyo Twilight* reflects how the sins of one generation get passed on to the next. It is illustrated impressively by a number of parallels drawn discreetly between characters, as it manages to be, at turns, both compassionate and scathing. Ozu has said: "Many people have found this picture to be about the wild behavior of the daughter, but I think the emphasis lies on the younger generation as a foil for the older." (Richie 1974, p. 246) Bordwell (1988) finds this quotation quite curious, but points out that the father's story acts as bookends to frame the story of his wife and daughters. It is obvious how the sins of the mother have deeply affected her daughters, and she is cognizant of her transgression and is regretful about her behavior. The father, on the other hand, is more obtuse about his role in the way things have played out for his daughters. At one point in the film, Akiko is picked up by the police for being out so late, alone and unsupervised. After Takako returns from retrieving her, he talks with Takako about Akiko and she speaks directly about how Akiko, and herself in turn, have grown up without a mother: "Akiko's lonely. I am sure of it. You must be gentle with her. She grew up with out a mother and that's why. It's different without a mother." In saying this, Takako is also describing her own upbringing. Richie (1974) points out that Shukichi has a complete unawareness of his role in the situation. It never occurs to him that if he had acted differently the whole charade may have played out quite

differently and that it may have been at least half his fault. He says: “I’ve looked after her paid so much attention to her that I was afraid you’d be jealous. And now look at her. Something’s gone wrong.” It is apparent to Takako that he is baffled when he follows this statement with something more banal: “Well, bringing up a child is certainly a difficult thing.” Akiko proves to take after her father. She questions him as to whether she is wanted, since her mother abandoned her and says she wishes she had never been born. Then when she confronts her mother about her origins, she tells her mother: “I’ll never have a baby. Never. But if I do I won’t abandon it like you did yours. I’ll love it-love with all my heart.” She says this after she has had an abortion after getting pregnant. The sins of the parents manifest themselves in the trials and tribulations of the young in their early adulthood. Takako goes as far as to suggest to her mother that she was responsible for Akiko’s death because of her abandonment of their family. The unhappiness of the daughters can be directly linked to the mother’s abandonment and the father’s inability to communicate properly with his daughters.

Conclusion

It cannot be denied that *Tokyo Twilight* marks a departure of sorts from the pattern of film making that Ozu had been preoccupied with in the postwar period. It seems that Ozu was inspired by Naruse to use some darker material to show the dissolution of the family in a different manner. However, he may have been dissuaded from continuing in this vein in light of its poor record at the box office and among critics of the time. That being said, the film’s reputation over time has improved and it has been noted for the strong performances by Arima and Hara. This change in critical appreciation can be seen in its inclusion in the Criterion *Eclipse Series 3: Late Ozu* box set. In Ozu’s next film, *Equinox Flower* (1958), his first color film, he returns to the theme of an upper middle class marriageable daughter leaving the nest. It is a return to the “official view” of Japanese society, where families are reluctantly dissolved of the mutual dependence of parent and child. It is a much more positive, uncomplicated, and straightforward film for Ozu. Of the late the films, the closest he would come again to the more melodramatic aspects of *Tokyo Twilight* would be in, *Floating Weeds*, the remake of an earlier film, which features a son who thinks his father is his uncle, a traveling actor. *Tokyo Twilight* would be Ozu’s last step into the dark Narusian world of bleak disappointment and heartbreak.

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